



Guiding Stars Takes Home MIT Trophy

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Guiding Stars®
Nutritious choices made simple®

Last month, Retail Business Services, the services company of Ahold Delhaize USA, Peapod Digital Labs and Guiding Stars wrapped up exciting partnerships with Massachusetts Institute of Technology's (MIT) Analytics Lab, and judges crowned a project led by Guiding Stars as the first-place winner.

Over the course of 12 weeks, nearly 100 MIT master's degree candidates partnered with companies – including Retail Business Services, Peapod Digital Labs and Guiding Stars – to use machine learning and data analytics to find solutions to real-world business problems.

Guiding Stars, a subsidiary of Ahold Delhaize USA with the mission to make healthy eating easier, asked students to analyze sales data to help determine if brand promotions in conjunction with the program's rating system incentivized shoppers to purchase healthier food.

"To be to be chosen as the top project out of all the excellent projects these students did was really gratifying," said Julie Greene, Director of Guiding Stars.

By analyzing sales data, students discovered that small, broad discounts don't have much of an impact on the amount of healthy food customers with smaller baskets purchased – but it did change the way customers making larger purchases shopped.

"We saw that there was an impact and a change in the amount of nutritious food they purchased," Julie said. "It allows us to be more strategic."

It was a challenging project, but that's part of what helped bring the group victory during the students' final presentations, which were judged by MIT faculty and local business leaders.

"One of the points the judges brought up was that Guiding Stars had framed a really good question for them to look at," said Eric Braun, Director of Innovation and Enterprise Mobility for Retail Business Services. "Not only that, but the project ran into some obstacles gathering data and had to pivot and aim at a moving target. And that's the nature of artificial intelligence projects. It's not something you go into knowing how you're going to solve it. It's a discovery project. This project won first place because it provided that invaluable lesson and experience."

The winning team will have its name etched on the trophy that resembles the Stanley Cup, and will "carry the torch of Data Science" for the next year.

Other partnerships with MIT's Analytics Lab included a project with Retail Business Services examining how shopper behaviors change before and during emergencies such as snowstorms, hurricanes and pandemics, as well as a Peapod Digital Labs project examining how product assortments can be optimized to increase e-commerce sales.

"We believe partnerships are valuable to our ability to innovate. This collaboration complements our existing partnership with MIT as a founding member and board member of the MIT CSAIL Machine Learning Alliance," said Eric. "It also highlights our connections with career services for hiring of co-op students and full-time associates, and a variety of other collaborations with students and researchers to further our ability to improve our data science capabilities and bring value from our data to the brands."